

# SOLDIER SONGS

*By*

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LOS ANGELES



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Patrick MacGill  
21 mas '21

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BY

PATRICK MACGILL



HERBERT JENKINS LIMITED  
ARUNDEL PLACE HAYMARKET  
LONDON S.W. ☰ ☰ MCMXVII

WILLIAM BRENDON AND SON, LTD., PRINTERS, PLYMOUTH  
ENGLAND

PR  
6025  
M175 .3

MY DEAR H. J.,

You have often asked me what are the favourite songs of the soldier on Active Service, the rhymed lines which give expression to his soul. It is difficult to give an answer, the mere words are "dud" shells, which drop harmlessly to earth close to their objective. The soldier and his song cannot be separated from their surroundings.

Let me explain and quote in illustration an incident which occurred a few weeks ago.

A certain regiment, which glories in the name of the "Old Diehards," sent a

draft to the "London Irish," and the new-comers attached to our battalion became part of the units' fighting strength. Sixty per cent of the draft were "old sweats," men who had fought well on many a bloody field, and added by prowess of arms numerous honours to their own beloved regiment. They had shared their last crust with hearty comrades in the retreat from Mons, they battled side by side with these comrades on the Marne, and wept over their graves by the Aisne.

The circumstances of war strengthen the *esprit-de-corps* of a soldier, and I am not far wrong in stating that pride of regiment in an "old sweat" is much stronger than love of country. On the evening of their arrival these veterans

sat in their huts and sang the song of the “Old Diehards.” Mere doggerel the verse, the words fatuous, and the singing not above reproach. But the song touched the hearts of the audience ; the listeners were “old sweats” who had songs of their own.

As I listened I thought of the children of Israel, who hung their harps on the willows and mourned for Babylon. The feeling engendered in a man when a futile shell drops close to him and fails to explode is difficult to make manifest in cold words ; but it is even more difficult to give an adequate idea of the impression created in the hearts of those who listened to the song of the “Old Diehards.” The soldiers have songs of their own, songs of the march, the trench,

the billet and battle. Their origin is lost ; the songs have arisen like old folktales, spontaneous choruses that voice the moods of a moment and of many moments which are monotonously alike. Most of the verse is of no import ; the crowd has no sense of poetic values ; it is the singing alone which gives expression to the soldier's soul. "Tipperary" means home when it is sung in a shell-shattered billet, on the long march "Tipperary" is Berlin, the goal of high emprise and great adventures.

Let me speak of a few songs which we sing. This is our idea of the peace which may follow our years of war.

" When the war is over  
We're going to live in Dover,  
When the war is over we're going to have a spree,

We're going to have a fight  
In the middle of the night  
With the whizz-bangs a-flying in the air."

Though we cannot picture a peace which will be in no way associated with high explosives, we can dream in the midst of the conflict of the desirable things that civil life would bring us.

What time we waited for Kitchener's Army in Flanders and lost all hope of ever seeing it, this song was sung up and down the trenches by the Territorials and Regulars.

" Who are the boys that fighting's for,  
Who are the lads to win the war,  
It's good old Kitchener's Army.  
And every man of them's très bon,  
They never lost a trench since Mons,  
Because they never saw one."

Here are a few others which have echoed in billets and dug-outs from Le Harve to the Somme, and which have accompanied the wild abandon of drinking nights in Poperinghe and Bethune.

#### THE SOLDIER'S LETTER

“ I've lost my rifle and bayonet,  
I've lost my pull-through too,  
I've lost the socks that you sent me  
That lasted the whole winter through,  
I've lost the razor that shaved me,  
I've lost my four-by-two,  
I've lost my hold-all and now I've got damn all  
Since I've lost you.”

#### SING ME TO SLEEP

Sing me to sleep where bullets fall,  
Let me forget the war and all ;  
Damp is my dug-out, cold my feet,  
Nothing but bully and biscuits to eat.  
Over the sandbags helmets you'll find  
Corpses in front and corpses behind.

*Chorus.*

Far, far from Ypres I long to be,  
Where German snipers can't get at me,  
Think of me crouching where the worms creep,  
Waiting for the sergeant to sing me to sleep.

Sing me to sleep in some old shed,  
The rats all running around my head,  
Stretched out upon my waterproof,  
Dodging the raindrops through the roof,  
Dreaming of home and nights in the West,  
Somebody's overseas boots on my chest.

The Tommy is a singing soldier ; he sings to the village patronne even when ordering food, and his song is in French.

“ Voulez vous donnez moi  
Si'l vous plaît  
Pain et beurre  
Et café au lait.”

He serenades the maiden at the village pump.

## DEDICATION

“ Après la guerre fini  
Soldat Anglais partee,  
M’selle Frongsay boko pleury,  
Après la guerre fini.”

The soldier has in reality very few songs ; he has many choruses which get worth from the mood that inspires them and the emotions which they evoke. None will outlast the turmoil in which they originated ; having weathered the leaden storms of war, their vibrant strains will be choked and smothered in atmospheres of Peace. “ These ’ere songs are no good in England,” my friend Rifleman Bill Teake remarks. “ They ’ave too much guts in them.”

When I said I wanted to dedicate “ Soldier Songs ” to you I did not then anticipate inflicting upon you so lengthy

a dedicatory letter ; but when writing of the men of the British armies, old and new, I find it difficult to be concise.

Yours,

PATRICK MACGILL.

*Lammas Day, 1916.*



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## **SOLDIER SONGS**



## AFTER LOOS

*(Café Pierre le Blanc, Nouex les Mines, Michaelmas  
Eve, 1915.)*

Was it only yesterday  
Lusty comrades marched away ?  
Now they're covered up with clay.  
•

Seven glasses used to be  
Called for six good mates and me—  
Now we only call for three.

Little crosses neat and white,  
Looking lonely every night,  
Tell of comrades killed in fight.

Hearty fellows they have been,  
And no more will they be seen  
Drinking wine in Nouex les Mines.

Lithe and supple lads were they,  
Marching merrily away—  
Was it only yesterday ?

## THE OLE SWEATS

(*1st Birmingham War Hospital, Ruberry, Birmingham.*)

WE'RE goin' easy now a bit, all dressed in  
blighty blue,\*

We've 'eld the trenches eighteen months and  
copped some packets too,

We've met the Boches on the Marne and fought  
them on the Aisne,

We broke 'em up at New Chapelle and 'ere we  
are again.

The ole sweats—

All that is left of the ole sweats.

More went away than are with us to-day.

Gawd ! but we miss 'em, the ole sweats.

\* Hospital uniform.

And now that we've a blighty one\* we don't  
know what to do!—

Just swing the lead ; the Darby boys will see  
the bisness through,

They'll 'ave a bit o' carry on, o' fightin' and o'  
fun,

They'll 'ave the ribbons when they end the  
work that we begun.

The ole sweats—

Devils for fun were the ole sweats,  
In love or a scrap sure they always went nap,  
They 'adn't 'arf guts had the ole sweats.

But the old sweats they never die, they only  
fade away

And others come to take their place, 'ot on  
the doin's they ;

\* A blighty one. A wound which brings a soldier back to England.

They're drillin' up from day to day, at it at  
dusk and dawn,

But they'll need it all to fill the shoes of blokes  
that now are gone ;

    The ole sweats,

    The ole daisy-shovers,\* the ole sweats.

The new 'uns it's said they are smart on  
parade,

But, Gawd, there is none like the ole sweats.

We're out 't for duration now and do not care  
a cuss,

There's beer to spare at dinner time and afters†  
now for us,

But if our butty's still were out in Flanders  
raisin' Cain,

We'd weather through with those we knew on  
bully beef again.

\* Daisy-shovers. The dead ; "the men who lie under the ground, shoving the daisies up with their toes."

† Afters=confiture.

The ole sweats—

The grub it was skimp with the ole sweats.

But if rashuns was small 'twas the same for  
us all,

Same for the 'ole of the ole sweats.

Well, if you want a sooveneer, a bit of blighty  
blue,

There's empty tunic sleeves to spare, a trousers  
leg or two,

And some day when you see us stand on  
Charing Cross parade,

Present a boot before us just to 'elp us at our  
trade.

The ole sweats—

Tuppence a shine with the ole sweats.

So you'll give us a show when you see us, we  
know,

Us that is left of the ole sweats.

## LA BASSEE ROAD

(*Cuinchy, 1915.*)

You'll see from the La Bassée Road, on any  
summer's day,

The children herding nanny-goats, the women  
making hay.

You'll see the soldiers, khaki clad, in column  
and platoon,

Come swinging up La Bassée Road from billets  
in Bethune.

There's hay to save and corn to cut, but harder  
work by far

Awaits the soldier boys who reap the harvest  
fields of war.

You'll see them swinging up the road where  
women work at hay,

The straight long road,—La Bassée Road,—on  
any summer day.

The night-breeze sweeps La Bassée Road, the  
night-dews wet the hay,

The boys are coming back again, a straggling  
crowd are they.

The column's lines are broken, there are gaps  
in the platoon,

They'll not need many billets, now, for soldiers  
in Bethune,

For many boys, good lusty boys, who marched  
away so fine,

Have now got little homes of clay beside the  
firing line.

Good luck to them, God speed to them, the  
boys who march away,

A-singing up La Bassée road each sunny  
summer day.

## A LAMENT

*(The Ritz-Loos Salient.)*

I WISH the sea were not so wide  
That parts me from my love ;  
I wish the things men do below  
Were known to God above.

I wish that I were back again  
In the glens of Donegal,  
They'll call me coward if I return,  
But a hero if I fall.

“ Is it better to be a living coward,  
Or thrice a hero dead ? ”  
“ It’s better to go to sleep, my lad,”  
The Colour Sergeant said.

## THE GUNS

*(Shivery-shake Dug-out, Maroc.)*

THERE's a battery snug in the spinney,  
A French seventy-five in the mine,  
A big nine-point-two in the village  
Three miles to the rear of the line.  
The gunners will clean them at dawning  
And slumber beside them all day,  
But the guns chant a chorus at sunset,  
And then you should hear what they say.

### *Chorus.*

Whizz bang ! pip squeak ! ss-ss-st !  
Big guns, little guns waken up to it.  
We're in for heaps of trouble, dug-outs at  
the double,  
And stretcher-bearers ready to tend the  
boys who're hit.

And then there's the little machine-gun,—

A beggar for blood going large.

Go, fill up his belly with iron,

And he'll spit in the face of a charge.

The foe fixed his ladders at daybreak,

He's over the top with the sun ;

He's waiting ; for ever he's waiting,

The pert little vigilant gun.

*Chorus.*

Its tit-tit ! tit-tit ! tit ! tit ! tit !

Hark the little terror bristling up to it !

See his victims lying, wounded sore and  
dying—

Red the field and volume on which his name  
is writ.

The howitzer lurks in an alley,

(The howitzer isn't a fool,)

With a bearing of snub-nosed detachment  
He squats like a toad on a stool  
He's a close-lipped and masterly beggar,  
A fellow with little to say,  
But the little he says he can say in  
A most irrepressible way.

*Chorus.*

OO—plonk ! OO-plonk ! plonk ! plonk !  
plonk !

The bomb that bears the message riots  
through the air.

The dug-outs topple over on the foemen  
under cover,

They'll slumber through revelly who get  
the message there !

The battery barks in the spinney,  
The howitzer *plonks* like the deuce,

The big nine point two speaks like thunder  
And shatters the houses in Loos,  
Sharp chatters the little machine-gun,  
Oh ! when will its chattering stop ?—  
At dawn, when we swarm up the ladders ;  
At dawn we go over the top !

*Chorus.*

Whizz bang ! pip squeak ! OO-plonk ! sst !  
Up the ladders ! Over ! And carry on  
with it !

The guns all chant their chorus, the shells  
go whizzing o'er us :—

Forward, hearties ! Forward to do our  
little bit !

## THE NIGHT BEFORE AND THE NIGHT AFTER THE CHARGE

ON sword and gun the shadows reel and riot,  
A lone breeze whispers at the dug-out door,  
The trench is silent and the night is quiet,  
And boys in khaki slumber on the floor.

A sentinel on guard, my watch I keep  
And guard the dug-out where my  
comrades sleep.

The moon looks down upon a ghost-like figure,  
Delving a furrow in the cold, damp sod.  
The grave is ready and the lonely digger  
Leaves the departed to their rest and God.  
I shape a little cross and plant it deep  
To mark the dug-out where my com-  
rades sleep.

## IT'S A FAR, FAR CRY

It's a far, far cry to my own land,  
A hundred leagues or more,  
To moorlands where the fairies flit  
In Rosses and Gweedore,  
Where white-maned waves come prancing up  
To Dooran's rugged shore.

There's a cabin there by a holy well,  
Once blessed by Columbcille,  
And a holly bush and a fairy fort  
On the slope of Glenties Hill,  
Where the dancing feet of many winds  
Go roving at their will.

My heart is sick of the level lands,  
Where the wingless windmills be,  
Where the long-nosed guns from dusk to dawn  
Are speaking angrily ;  
But the little home by Glenties Hill,  
Ah ! that's the place for me.

A candle stuck on the muddy floor  
Lights up the dug-out wall,  
And I see in its flame the prancing sea  
And the mountains straight and tall ;  
For my heart is more than often back  
By the hills of Donegal.

## OFF DUTY

THE night is full of magic, and the moonlit  
dewdrops glisten

Where the blossoms close in slumber and the  
questing bullets pass—

Where the bullets hit the level I can hear them  
as I listen,

Like a little cricket concert, chirping chorus in  
the grass.

In the dug-out by the traverse there's a candle-  
flame a-winking

And the fireflies on the sandbags have their  
torches all aflame.

As I watch them in the moonlight, sure, I  
cannot keep from thinking,

That the world I knew and this one carry on  
the very same.

Look ! A gun flash to the eastward ! " Cover,  
matey ! Under cover !

Don't you know the flash of danger ? You  
should know that signal well ;

You can hear it as it's coming. There it passes ;  
swooping over.

There's a threat of desolation in the passing of  
a shell."

Little spears of grass are waving, decked with  
jewels iridescent—

Hark ! A man on watch is stricken—I can  
hear his dying moan—

Lies a road across the starland near the wan  
and waning crescent,

Where a sentinel off-duty goes to reach his  
Maker's Throne.

I OFT GO OUT AT NIGHT-TIME

I OFT go out at night-time  
When all the sky's a-flare  
And little lights of battle  
Are dancing in the air.

I use my pick and shovel  
To dig a little hole,  
And there I sit till morning—  
A listening-patrol.

A silly little sickle  
Of moon is hung above ;  
Within a pond beside me  
The frogs are making love :

I see the German sap-head ;

A cow is lying there,

Its belly like a barrel,

Its legs are in the air.

The big guns rip like thunder,

The bullets whizz o'erhead,

But o'er the sea in England

Good people lie abed.

And over there in England

May every honest soul

Sleep sound while we sit watching

On listening patrol.

## THE CROSS

*(On the grave of an unknown British soldier,  
Givenchy, 1915.)*

THE cross is twined with gossamer,—

    The cross some hand has shaped with care,  
And by his grave the grasses stir  
    But he is silent sleeping there.

The guns speak loud : he hears them not ;  
    The night goes by : he does not know ;  
A lone white cross stands on the spot,  
    And tells of one who sleeps below.

The brooding night is hushed and still,  
    The crooning breeze draws quiet breath,  
A star-shell flares upon the hill  
    And lights the lowly house of death.

Unknown, a soldier slumbers there,  
While mournful mists come dropping low,  
But oh ! a weary maiden's prayer,  
And oh ! a mother's tears of woe.

## THE TOMMY'S LAMENT

*(The Ritz-Loos Salient.)*

I FANCY it's not 'arf my chance  
To go on plodding 'neath my pack,  
Parading like a snail through France,  
My house upon my bloomin' back.

My wants are few, but what I need  
Ain't not so much of bully stew,  
Nor biscuits, that's a mongrel's feed,  
But, matey, just 'twixt me and you—

When winks the early evening star,  
And shadows o'er the trenches come—  
I wish the sergeants brought a jar,  
And issued double tots of rum,

## MARCHING

*(La Bassée Road, June, 1915.)*

FOUR by four, in column of route,  
By roads that the poplars sentinel,  
Clank of rifle and crunch of boot—  
All are marching and all is well.  
  
White, so white is the distant moon,  
Salmon-pink is the furnace glare  
And we hum, as we march, a ragtime tune,  
Khaki boys in the long platoon,  
Ready for anything—anywhere.  
  
Lonely and still the village lies,  
The houses sleep and the blinds are drawn,  
The road is straight as the bullet flies,  
And we go marching into the dawn ;

Salmon-pink is the furnace sheen.

Where the coal stacks bulk in the ghostly air

The long platoons on the move are seen,

Little connecting files between,

Moving and moving, anywhere.

## IN FAIRYLAND

THE field is red with poppy flowers,  
Where mushroom meadows stand ;  
It's only seven fairy hours  
From there to Fairyland.

Now when the star-shells riot up  
In flares of red and green,  
Each fairy leaves her buttercup  
And goes to see her queen.

Where little, ghostly moonbeams stray  
Through mushroom alleys white,  
The fairies carry on their way  
A glow-worm lamp for light.

For them the journey's always short ;  
They're happy as you please,  
A-riding to the Fairy Court  
On backs of bumble-bees.

The cricket and the grasshopper  
Are thridding in the grass,  
And making paths of gossamer  
For fairy feet to pass.

Whene'er I see a glow-worm light  
In Boyau\* seventeen,  
I know the fairies go that night  
To see the Fairy Queen.

\* French communication trench.

## SPOILS OF WAR

I HAVE a big French rifle, its stock is riddled  
clean,

And shrapnel-smashed its barrel, likewise its  
magazine.

I've lugged it from Bethune to Loos and back  
from Loos again,

I've found it on the battlefield amidst the  
soldiers slain.

A little battle souvenir for one across the foam  
That's if the French authorities will let me  
take it home.

I've got a long, long sabre as sharp as any  
lance,

'Twas carried by a shepherd boy from somewhere South in France

Where grasses wave and poppy-flowers are red  
as blood is red.

I took the shepherd's sabre for the shepherd  
boy lay dead.

I'll take it back a souvenir to one across the  
foam

That's if the French authorities will let me  
take it home,

That's if our own authorities will give me leave  
for home !!!

## BEFORE THE CHARGE

(*Loos, 1915.*)

THE night is still and the air is keen,  
Tense with menace the time crawls by,  
In front is the town and its homes are seen,  
Blurred in outline against the sky.

The dead leaves float in the sighing air,  
The darkness moves like a curtain drawn,  
A veil which the morning sun will tear  
From the face of death.—We charge at dawn.

## LETTERS

*(Vermelles, August, 1915.)*

WHEN stand-to hour is over we leave the  
parapet,

And scamper to our dug-out to smoke a  
cigarette ;

The post has brought in parcels and letters for  
us all,

And now we'll light a candle, a little penny  
candle,

A tiny tallow candle, and stick it to the wall.

Dark shadows cringe and cower on roof and  
wall and floor,

And little roving breezes come rustling through  
the door ;

We open up the letters of friends across the  
foam,

And thoughts go back to London, again we  
dream of London—

We see the lights of London, of London and of  
home.

We've parcels small and parcels of a quite  
gigantic size,

We've Devon cream and butter and apples  
baked in pies,

We'll make a night of feasting and all will have  
their fill—

See, cot-mate Bill has dainties, such dandy,  
dinky dainties,

She's one to choose the dainties, the maid  
that's gone on Bill.

Oh : Kensington for neatness ; it packs its  
parcels well,

Though Bow is always bulky it isn't quite as  
swell,

But here there's no distinction 'twixt Kensington  
and Bow,

We're comrades in the dug-out, all equals in  
the dug-out,

We're comrades in the dug-out and fight a  
common foe.

Here comes the ration party with tins of bully  
stew—

“ Clear off your ration party, we have no need  
of you ;

“ Maconachie for breakfast ? It ain’t no  
bloomin’ use,  
We’re faring far, far better, our gifts from  
home are better,  
Look here, we’ve something better than bully  
after Loos.”

The post comes trenchward nightly ; we hail  
the post with glee,  
Though now we’re not as many as once we  
used to be,  
For some have done their fighting, packed up  
and gone away,  
And many boys are sleeping, no sound will  
break their sleeping,  
Brave lusty comrades sleeping in little homes  
of clay.

We all have read our letters, but one's untouched so far,

An English maiden's letter to her sweetheart at the War,

And when we write in answer to tell her how he fell,

What can we say to cheer her ? Oh, what is now to cheer her ?

There's nothing left to cheer her except the news to tell.

We'll write to her to-morrow and this is what we'll say,

He breathed her name in dying ; in peace he passed away—

No words about his moaning, his anguish and his pain,

When slowly, slowly dying. God ! Fifteen  
hours in dying !

He lay a maimed thing dying, alone upon the  
plain.

We often write to mothers, to sweethearts and  
to wives,

And tell how those who loved them have given  
up their lives ;

If we're not always truthful, our lies are always  
kind,

Our letters lie to cheer them, to solace and to  
cheer them,

Oh : anything to cheer them,—the women left  
behind.

## THE EVERYDAY OF WAR

*(Hospital, Versailles, November, 1915.)*

A HAND is crippled, a leg is gone,

And fighting's past for me,

The empty hours crawl slowly on ;

How they flew where I used to be !

Empty hours in the empty days,

And empty months crawl by,

The brown battalions go their way

And here at the Base I lie !

I dream of the grasses the dew-drops drench,

And the earth with the soft rain wet,

I dream of the curve of a winding trench,

And a loop-holed parapet ;

The sister wraps my bandage again,  
Oh, gentle the sister's hand,  
But the smart of a restless longing, vain,  
She cannot understand.

At night I can see the trench once more,  
And the dug-out candle lit,  
The shadows it throws on wall and floor  
Form and flutter and flit.  
Over the trenches the night-shades fall  
And the questing bullet pings,  
And a brazier glows by the dug-out wall,  
Where the bubbling mess-tin sings.

I dream of the long, white, sleepy night  
Where the fir-lined roadway runs  
Up to the shell-scarred fields of fight  
And the loud-voiced earnest guns ;

The rolling limber and jolting cart

The khaki-clad platoon,

The eager eye and the stout young heart,

And the silver-sandalled moon.

But here I'm kept to the narrow bed,

A maimed and broken thing—

Never a long day's march ahead

Where brown battalions swing.

But though time drags by like a wounded snake

Where the young life's lure's denied,

A good stiff lip for the old pal's sake,

And the old battalion's pride !

The ward-fire burns in a cheery way,

A vision in every flame,

There are books to read and games to play.

But oh ! for an old, old game,

With glancing bay-net and trusty gun  
And wild blood, bursting free!—  
But an arm is crippled, a leg is gone,  
And the game's no more for me.

## THE LONDON LADS

*(While standing to arms in billets, La Beuvrière,  
July, 1915.)*

ALONG the road in the evening the brown  
battalions wind,  
With the trenches' threat of death before, the  
peaceful homes behind ;  
And luck is with you or luck is not as the ticket  
of fate is drawn,  
The boys go up to the trench at dusk, but who  
will come back at dawn ?

The winds come soft of an evening o'er the  
fields of golden grain,  
The good sharp scythes will cut the corn ere we  
come back again ;

The village girls will tend the grain and mill the  
Autumn yield  
While we go forth to other work upon another  
field.

They'll cook the big brown Flemish loaves and  
tend the oven fire,  
And while they do the daily toil of barn and  
bench and byre  
They'll think of hearty fellows gone and sigh  
for them in vain—  
The billet boys, the London lads who won't  
come back again.

## THE LITTLE BROWN BIRD

THERE'S a little brown bird in the  
spinney,

With a little gold cap on its head,  
Gold as the gold of a guinea,  
And its legs they are wobbly and  
red.

MYSELF. " Little brown bird, is your singing  
Over and finished and done ? "

BIRD. " I wait for the fairy who's bringing  
Spring and its showers and its sun."

MYSELF. " What will you do in December ? "

BIRD. " Do ? What I'm doing just now :  
Here on the first of November,  
Shivering mute on a bough."

MYSELF. "But April will find you quite  
cheery!"

I said with a pang in my breast.

BIRD. "In April I'll get me a dearie  
And help her to fashion a nest."

## THE LISTENING-PATROL

WITH my bosom friend, Bill, armed ready to  
kill,

I go over the top as a listening-patrol.  
Good watch we will keep if we don't fall asleep,  
As we huddle for warmth in a shell-shovelled  
hole.

In the battle-lit night all the plain is alight,  
Where the grasshoppers chirp to the frogs  
in the pond,

And the star-shells are seen bursting red, blue,  
and green,

O'er the enemy's trench just a stone's-throw  
beyond.

The grasses hang damp o'er each wee glow-worm lamp

That is placed on the ground for a fairy camp-fire,

And the night-breezes wheel where the mice squeak and squeal,

Making sounds like the enemy cutting our wire.

Here are thousands of toads in their ancient abodes,

Each toad on its stool and each stool in its place,

And a robin sits by with a vigilant eye

On a grim garden-spider's wife washing her face.

Now Bill never sees any marvels like these,

When I speak of the sights he looks up with amaze,

And he smothers a yawn, saying, "Wake me at  
dawn,"

While the Dustman from Nod sprinkles dust  
in his eyes.

But these things you'll see if you come out  
with me,

And sit by my side in a shell-shovelled hole,  
Where the fairy-bells croon to the ivory moon  
When the soldier is out on a listening-patrol.

## A VISION

THIS is a tale of the trenches  
Told when the shadows creep  
Over the bay and traverse  
And poppies fall asleep.

When the men stand still to their rifles,  
And the star-shells riot and flare,  
Flung from the sandbag alleys,  
Into the ghostly air.

They see in the growing grasses  
That rise from the beaten zone  
Their poor unforgotten comrades  
Wasting in skin and bone,

And the grass creeps silently o'er them  
Where comrade and foe are blent  
In God's own peaceful churchyard  
When the fire of their might is spent.

But the men who stand to their rifles  
See all the dead on the plain  
Rise at the hour of midnight  
To fight their battles again.

Each to his place in the combat,  
All to the parts they played  
With bayonet, brisk to its purpose,  
Rifle and hand grenade.

Shadow races with shadow,  
Steel comes quick on steel,  
Swords that are deadly silent  
And shadows that do not feel.

And shades recoil and recover  
And fade away as they fall  
In the space between the trenches,  
And the watchers see it all.

A.D. 1916

THE sky shows cold where the roof has been,  
But the stars of night are none the dimmer,  
Where the home once stood are the ruins seen,  
But the brazier glows with a cheery glimmer,  
And the old life goes and the new life fills  
The scenes of many a peasant story,  
And the bursting shells on the sentried hills  
Whisper of death but shout of glory !

Gutted and ripped the stricken earth,  
Where the bones of the restless dead are  
showing ;  
But the great earth breathes of life and birth,  
And ruin shrinks from the blossoms blowing.

The old life fails, but the new life comes  
Over the ruins scarred and hoary,  
Though the thunder of guns and the roll of  
drums  
But make for death while they shout of glory.

## THE HIPE

“ WHAT do you do with your rifle, son ? ” I  
clean it every day,

And rub it with an oily rag to keep the rust  
away ;

I slope, present, and port the thing when  
sweating on parade.

I strop my razor on the sling ; the bayonet  
stand is made

For me to hang my mirror on. I often use it,  
too,

As handle for the dixie, sir, and lug around the  
stew.

“ But did you ever fire it, son ? ” Just once,  
but never more.

I fired it at a German trench, and when my  
work was o'er

The sergeant down the barrel glanced, and  
then he said to me,

" Your hipe\* is dirty. Penalty is seven days'  
C.B. ! "

\* Hipe, regimental slang for a rifle.

## THE TRENCH

THE long trench, twisting, turning, wanders  
wayward as a river

Through the poppy-flowers blooming in the  
grasses dewy wet,

The buttercups sit shyly and the daisies nod  
and quiver,

Where the bright defiant bayonets rim the  
sandbagged parapet,

In the peaceful dawn the trenches hold a  
menace and a threat.

The last faint evening streamer touches heaven  
with its finger,

The vast night's starry legion sends its first  
lone herald star,

Around the bay and traverse little twilight  
colours linger  
And incense-laden breezes come in crooning  
from afar,  
To where above the sandbags gleam the steely  
fangs of war.

All the night the frogs go chuckle, all the day  
the birds are singing  
In the pond beside the meadow, by the  
roadway poplar-lined,  
In the field between the trenches are a million  
blossoms springing  
'Twixt the grass of silver bayonets where the  
lines of battle wind  
Where man has manned the trenches for the  
maiming of his kind.

## ON ACTIVE SERVICE

FOR the bloke on Active Service, w'en 'e goes

across the sea,

'E's sure to stand in terror of the things 'e  
doesn't see,

A 'and grenade or mortar as it leaves the other  
side

You can see an' 'ear it comin', so you simply  
steps aside.

The aeroplane above you may go droppin'  
bombs a bit,

But lyin' in your dug-out you're unlucky if  
you're 'it.

W'en the breezes fills your trenches with  
hasfixiatin' gas,

You puts on your respirator an' allows the  
stuff to pass.

W'en you're up against a feller with a bayonet  
long an' keen,

Just 'ave purchase of your weapon an' you'll  
drill the beggar clean.

W'en man and 'oss is chargin' you, upon your  
knees you kneel,

An' catch the 'oss's breastbone with an inch  
or two of steel.

It's sure to end its canter, an' as the creature  
stops

The rider pitches forward an' you catch 'im as  
'e drops.

It's w'en 'e sees 'is danger, an' 'e knows 'is way  
about

That a bloke is damned unlucky if e's knocked  
completely out.

But out on Active Service there are dangers  
everywhere,

The shrapnel shell and bullet that comes on  
you unaware,

The saucy little rifle is a perky little maid,  
An' w'en you've got 'er message you 'ave done  
your last parade.

The four-point-five will seek you from some  
distant leafy wood,

An' taps you on the napper an' you're out of  
step for good.

From the gun within the spinney to the sniper  
up a tree

There are terrors waitin' Tommy in the things  
'e doesn't see.

## BILLETS

OUR old battalion billets still,  
Parades as usual go on,  
We buckle in with right good will  
And daily our equipment don  
As if we meant to fight, but no !  
The guns are booming through the air,  
The trenches call us on, but oh !  
We don't go there, we don't go there !

At night the stars are shining bright  
The old world voice is whispering near,  
We've heard it when the moon was light,  
And London's streets were very dear ;

But dearer now they are, sweetheart,  
The buses running to the Strand,—  
But we're so far, so far apart,  
Each lonely in a different land.

But, dear, with sentiment aside  
(The candle dwindleth to the cheese\*)  
I wish the sea were not so wide  
When distance brings such thoughts as these.  
One glance to see the foreign sky,  
One look to note the stars o'erhead,  
Sweet thoughts to you, sweetheart, and I  
Turn in to billet barn, and bed.

\* The Old Sweats fashion sconces from cheese.

## IN THE MORNING

(*Loos, 1915.*)

THE firefly haunts were lighted yet,  
As we scaled the top of the parapet ;  
But the East grew pale to another fire,  
As our bayonets gleamed by the foeman's  
wire ;  
And the sky was tinged with gold and grey,  
And under our feet the dead men lay,  
Stiff by the loop-holed barricade ;  
Food of the bomb and the hand-grenade ;  
Still in the slushy pool and mud—  
Ah ! the path we came was a path of blood,  
When we went to Loos in the morning.

A little grey church at the foot of a hill,  
With powdered glass on the window-sill.  
The shell-scarred stone and the broken tile,  
Littered the chancel, nave and aisle—  
Broken the altar and smashed the pyx,  
And the rubble covered the crucifix ;  
This we saw when the charge was done,  
And the gas-clouds paled in the rising  
sun,  
As we entered Loos in the morning.

The dead men lay on the shell-scarred plain,  
Where Death and the Autumn held their  
reign—  
Like banded ghosts in the heavens grey  
The smoke of the powder paled away ;  
Where riven and rent the spinney trees  
Shivered and shook in the sullen breeze,

And there, where the trench through the  
graveyard wound,  
The dead men's bones stuck over the ground  
By the road to Loos in the morning.

The turret towers that stood in the air,  
Sheltered a foeman sniper there—  
They found, who fell to the sniper's aim,  
A field of death on the field of fame ;  
And stiff in khaki the boys were laid  
To the sniper's toll at the barricade,  
But the quick went clattering through the  
town,  
Shot at the sniper and brought him down,  
As we entered Loos in the morning.

The dead men lay on the cellar stair,  
Toll of the bomb that found them there.

In the street men fell as a bullock drops,  
Sniped from the fringe of Hulluch copse.  
And the choking fumes of the deadly shell  
Curtained the place where our comrades fell,  
This we saw when the charge was done  
And the East blushed red to the rising sun  
In the town of Loos in the morning.

TO MARGARET

IF we forget the Fairies,  
And tread upon their rings,  
God will perchance forget us,  
And think of other things.

When we forget you, Fairies,  
Who guard our spirits' light :  
God will forget the morrow,  
And Day forget the Night.

## DEATH AND THE FAIRIES

BEFORE I joined the Army  
I lived in Donegal,  
Where every night the Fairies  
Would hold their carnival.

But now I'm out in Flanders,  
Where men like wheat-ears fall,  
And it's Death and not the Fairies  
Who is holding carnival.

## THE RETURN

THERE'S a tramp o' feet in the mornin',  
There's an oath from an N.C.O.,  
As up the road to the trenches  
The brown battalions go :  
Guns and rifles and wagons,  
Transports and horses and men,  
Up with the flush of the dawnin',  
And back with the night again.

Back again from the battle,  
From the mates we've left behind,  
And our officers are gloomy  
And the N.C.O.'s are kind ;

When a Jew's harp breaks the silence,  
Purring an old refrain,  
Singing the song of the soldier,  
"Here we are again!"

Here we are !

Here we are !

Oh ! here we are again !

Some have gone west,

Best of the best,

Lying out in the rain,

Stiff as stones in the open,

Out of the doings for good.

They'll never come back to advance or attack ;

But, God ! don't we wish that they could !

## RED WINE

Now seven supple lads and clean  
Sat down to drink one night,  
Sat down to drink at Nouex-les-Mines  
And then went off to fight ;  
And seven supple lads and clean  
Are finished with the fight,  
But only three at Nouex-les-Mines  
Sit down to drink to-night.

And when we took the cobbled road  
We often took before,  
Our thoughts were with the hearty lads  
Who trod that way no more.

Oh ! lads out on the level fields,  
If you could call to mind  
The good red wine at Nouex-les-Mines  
You would not stay behind !

And when we left the trench to-night,  
Each weary with his load,  
Grey, silent ghosts, as light as air,  
Came with us down the road.  
And now we sit us down to drink  
You sit beside us, too,  
And drink red wine at Nouex-les-Mines  
As once you used to do.

## THE DAWN

*(Givenchy.)*

THE dawn comes creeping o'er the plains,  
The saffron clouds are streaked with red,  
I hear the creaking limber chains,  
I see the drivers raise the reins  
And urge their weary mules ahead.

And men go up and men go down,  
The marching hosts are grand to see  
In shrapnel-shivered trench and town,  
In spinneys where the leaves of brown  
Are falling on the dewy lea.

Lonely and still the village lies,  
The houses sleeping, the blinds all drawn.

The road is straight as the bullet flies,  
The villagers fix their waking eyes  
On the shrapnel smoke that shrouds the  
dawn. ~

Out of the battle, out of the night,  
Into the dawn and the blush of day,  
The road that takes us back from the fight,  
The road we love, it is straight and white,  
And it runs from the battle, away, away.

## THE FLY

BUZZ-FLY and gad-fly, dragon-fly and blue,  
When you're in the trenches come and visit  
you,  
They revel in your butter-dish and riot on your  
ham,  
Drill upon the army cheese and loot the  
army jam.  
They're with you in the dusk and the dawning  
and the noon,  
They come in close formation, in column and  
platoon.  
There's never zest like Tommy's zest when  
these have got to die :  
For Tommy takes his puttees off and strafes the  
blooming fly.

## OUT YONDER

You may see his eye shine brightly, for he bears  
his burden lightly,  
As he makes his journey nightly up the long  
road from Bethune,  
With his bayonet briskly swinging, and you'll  
hear him singing, singing,  
In the silence and the silver, molten silver, of  
the moon.

Young and eager—bright his face is, spirit of  
the shrapneled places  
Where the homes are battered, broken, and the  
land in ruin lies.

But the young adventure burning gives him  
never time for yearning,  
And the natal flame of roving gleams like  
lightning in his eyes.

What awaits you, boy, out yonder, where the  
great guns rip and thunder ?

There's a menace in their message—guns that  
called you from afar.

But where'er your fortunes guide you may no  
woe or ill betide you—

Heaven speed you, little soldier, gaily going to  
the war.

## I WILL GO BACK

I'LL go back again to my father's house and live  
on my father's land—

For my father's house is by Rosses' shore that  
slopes to Dooran strand,  
And the wild mountains of Donegal rise up on  
either hand.

I have been gone from Donegal for seven years  
and a day,

And true enough it's a long, long while for a  
wanderer to stay—

But the hills of home are aye in my heart and  
never are far away.

The long white road winds o'er the hill from  
Fanad to Kilcar,  
And winds apast Gweebara Bay where the  
deep sea-waters are—  
Where the long grey boats go out by night to  
fish beyond the bar.

I'll lie by the beach the livelong day, where the  
foreshore dips to the sea—  
When the sun is red on the golden gorse as once  
it used to be ;  
And, O ! but it's many an olden thought will  
come up in the heart of me.

For the friends of my youth shall gather  
around, the friends that I knew of old,  
The olden songs will be sung to me and the old,  
old stories told

Beside the fire of my father's house when the  
nights are long and cold.

'Tis there that I'll pass my years away, back in  
my native land ;  
In my father's house by Rosses' shore that lies  
by Dooran strand,  
Where the hills of ancient Donegal rise up on  
either hand.

## THE FARMER'S BOY

[Every May, a great number of Donegal youths, whose ages range from twelve to fifteen years, go to the hiring fair of Strabane in the Co. Tyrone, and there, in the market-place, they are sold like cattle to the highest bidder. Their wages range from £3 to £5 for six months, and they have to work about eighteen hours a day.]

WHEN I went o'er the mountains a farmer's boy  
to be,

My mother wept all morning when taking leave  
of me ;

My heart was heavy in me, but I thrept that I  
was gay :

A man of twelve should never weep when going  
far away.

In the country o'er the mountains the rough  
roads straggle down,

There's many a long and weary mile 'twixt  
there and Glenties town ;

I went to be a farmer's boy, to work the season  
through,

From Whitsuntide to Hallowe'en, which time  
the rent came due.

When virgin pure, the dawn's white arm stole  
o'er my mother's door,

From Glenties town I took the road I never  
trod before ;

Come Lammas tide I would not see the trout  
in Greenan's Burn,

And Hallowe'en might come and go, but I  
would not return.

My mother's love for me is warm ; her house  
is cold and bare :  
A man who wants to see the world has little  
comfort there ;  
And there 'tis hard to pay the rent, for all you  
dig and delve,  
But there's hope beyond the mountains for a  
little man of twelve.

When I went o'er the mountains I worked for  
days on end,  
Without a soul to cheer me through or one to  
call me friend ;  
With older mates I toiled and toiled, in rain  
and heat and wind,  
And kept my place. A Glenties man is never  
left behind.

The farmer's wench looked down on me, for she  
was spruce and clean,

But men of twelve don't care for girls like lads  
of seventeen ;

And sorrow take the farmer's wench ! her  
pride could never hold

With mine when hoeing turnip fields with  
fellows twice as old.

And so from May to Hallowe'en I wrought and  
felt content,

And sent my wages through the post to pay my  
mother's rent ;

For I kept up the Glenties name, and blest,  
when all was done,

The pride that gave a man of twelve the  
strength of twenty-one.

## THE DUG-OUT

DEEPER than the daisies in the rubble and the  
loam,

Wayward as a river the winding trenches  
roam,

Past bowed, decrepit dug-outs leaning on their  
props,

Beyond the shattered village where the  
lightest limber stops ;

Through fields untilled and barren, and ripped  
by shot and shell,—

The bloodstained braes of Souchez, the  
meadows of Vermelles,

And poppies crown the parapet that rises from  
the mud—

Where the soldiers' homes—the dug-outs—  
are built of clay and blood.

Our comrades on the level roofs, the dead men,  
waste away

Upon the soldiers' frontier homes, the  
crannies in the clay;

For on the meadows of Vermelles, and all the  
country round,

The stiff and still stare at the skies, the quick  
are underground.

## STRAF' THAT FLY

*(Bully-Grenay.)*

THERE's the butter, gad, and horse-fly,  
The blow-fly and the blue,  
The fine fly and the coarse fly,  
But never flew a worse fly  
Of all the flies that flew

Than the little sneaky black fly  
That gobbles up our ham,  
The beggar's not a slack fly,  
He really is a crack fly,  
And wolfs the soldiers' jam.

So straf' that fly ! our motto  
Is " Straf' him when you can."  
He'll die because he ought to,  
He'll go because he's got to,  
So at him, every man !

## THE STAR-SHELL

(*Loos.*)

A STAR-SHELL holds the sky beyond  
Shell-shivered Loos, and drops  
In million sparkles on a pond  
That lies by Hulluch copse.

A moment's brightness in the sky,  
To vanish at a breath,  
And die away, as soldiers die  
Upon the wastes of death.

## AFTER THE WAR

WHEN I come back to England,  
And times of Peace come round,  
I'll surely have a shilling,  
And maybe have a pound.  
  
I'll walk the whole town over,  
And who shall say me nay,  
For I'm a British soldier  
With a British soldier's pay.

I only joined for fun,  
Never joined for profit—  
The Army pay is good,  
But, God! there's little of it.

When I come back to England

I won't be half a swell—

Ribbons for the scrapping

At Loos and New Chapelle.

I'll search the whole town over

To find another trade,

And be a blooming boot-black

On Charing Cross parade.

I will not leave for fun—

The change will bring me profit.

The Army pay is good,

But, God ! there's little of it.

## A SOLDIER'S PRAYER

GIVENCHY village lies a wreck, Givenchy  
Church is bare,  
No more the peasant maidens come to say  
their vespers there.  
The altar rails are wrenched apart, with rubble  
littered o'er,  
The sacred, broken sanctuary-lamp lies smashed  
upon the floor ;  
And mute upon the crucifix He looks upon it  
all—  
The great white Christ, the shrapnel-scorched,  
upon the eastern wall.

He sees the churchyard delved by shells, the  
tombstones flung about,  
And dead men's skulls, and white, white bones  
the shells have shovelled out ;  
The trenches running line by line through  
meadow fields of green,  
The bayonets on the parapets, the wasting  
flesh between ;  
Around Givenchy's ruined church the levels,  
poppy-red,  
Are set apart for silent hosts, the legions of  
the dead.

And when at night on sentry-go, with danger  
keeping tryst,  
I see upon the crucifix the blood-stained form  
of Christ

Defiled and maimed, the merciful on vigil all  
the time,

Pitying his children's wrath, their passion and  
their crime.

Mute, mute He hangs upon His Cross, the  
symbol of His pain,

And as men scourged Him long ago, they  
scourge Him once again—

There in the lonely war-lit night to Christ the  
Lord I call,

"Forgive the ones who work Thee harm. O  
Lord, forgive us all."

## DUG-OUT PROVERBS

HERE are the Old Sweats sayings. He tells the  
tale of his trade—

Gleanings from trench and dug-out, battle,  
fatigue, parade.

'Tis said the Boche has pluck enough. Of this  
I have no doubt,

But see him in the darkest light until you've  
knocked him out.

Your dug-out took you hours to build. Got  
broken in a minute!

A rotten shame ! Be thankful, son, your carcass  
isn't in it.

And if one shelters you a night tend it roof and  
rafter,

And make it better than it was—for those who  
follow after.

“The trench is calm,” you say, my son. The  
Boche is keeping quiet.

Then keep your rifle close at hand. We soon  
shall have a riot.

A soldier’s life is risky ; it may end damn quick.

Well, let it !

Since we get five francs every week we’ll burst  
it when we get it.

You may cough and sneeze in your dug-out,  
but you can’t go anywhere.

There’s little health around the house—the dead  
are lying there.

You may dig as deep as a spade can dig, but  
the Boche's eye can tell

Where the khaki moles have plied their trade,  
and the beggars burrow well.

Pray to God when the dirt\* flies over and the  
country flops about,

But stick to your dug-out all the same until  
you're ordered out.

When guns are going large a bit and sending  
gifts from Krupp,

You've got to keep your napper low, but keep  
your spirits up.

These are the dug-out maxims which the "Old  
Sweats" fling about,

For the better education of the "rooky" newly  
out.

\* Dirt. Trench term for shells.

## MATEY

*(Cambrin, May, 1915.)*

Not comin' back to-night, matey,  
And reliefs are comin' through,  
We're all goin' out all right, matey,  
Only we're leavin' you.

Gawd ! it's a bloody sin, matey,  
Now that we've finished the fight,  
We go when reliefs come in, matey,  
But you're stayin' 'ere to-night.

Over the top is cold, matey—  
You lie on the field alone,  
Didn't I love you of old, matey,  
Dearer than the blood of my own.

You were my dearest chum, matey—

(Gawd ! but your face is white)

But now, though reliefs 'ave come, matey,

I'm goin' alone to-night.

I'd sooner the bullet was mine, matey—

Goin' out on my own,

Leavin' you 'ere in the line, matey,

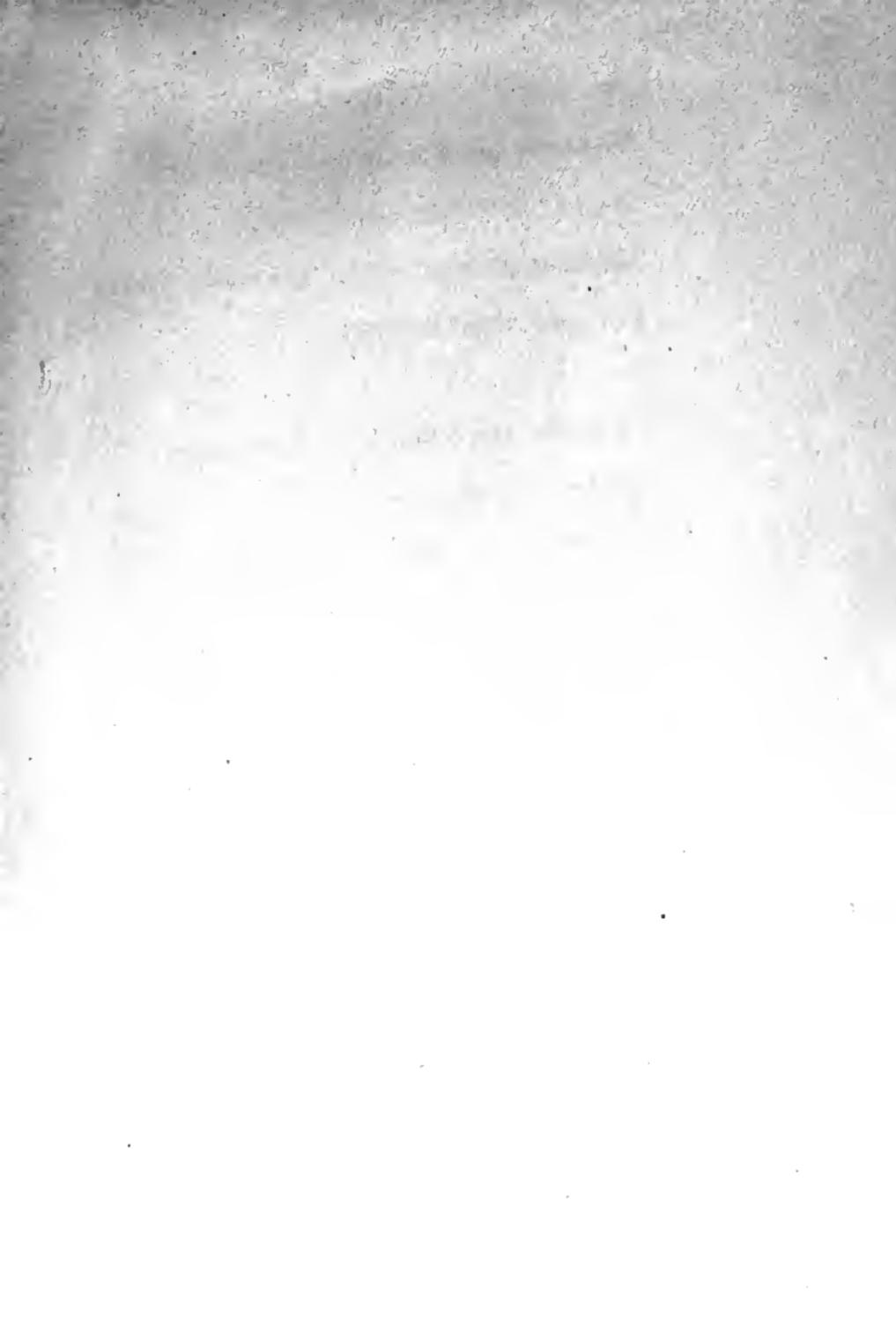
All by yourself, alone.

Chum o' mine and you're dead, matey,

And this is the way we part,

The bullet went through your head, matey,

But Gawd ! it went through my 'eart.



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